



PATRICK MARCHAL
DO YOU SEE THE KING?

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The Belgian silversmith and visual artist, creator of *Unidentified Prestigious Objects* with evocative names, Patrick Marchal explodes the traditional conventions of jewellery-making. He has made a name for himself through his critical approach and caustic humour. Nobody is bound by the impossible and as such, no holds are barred.

With their dash of free spirit, enhanced by fine silverwork, between derision and resymbolisation of the world, his creations are striking and meticulous in equal measure.



YEARS OF APPRENTICESHIP – OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

A self-taught designer, from an early age he analysed the technical aspects of jewellery-making in order to understand its mechanisms, as though he were taking delight in tuning up an engine and releasing the throttle.

Gifted in all things technical and confronted with existential questions - a heart-attack at the age of 20 - Patrick Marchal discovered other ambitions to which the French-speaking jewellery training structure, paralysed by its isolated sectors, could not respond. In order to make sense of it all, he listened to the songs of Hubert-Félix Thiéfaine, stringing together MTV clips and paper clips.

Having passed his General Certificate of Secondary Education, he obtained a two-year apprenticeship contract in the Fabienne Imbrechts jewellery workshop in Brussels, where he acquired most of his traditional skills. He very soon made his first diamond and platinum necklace!

His non-conformist streak drew him to works exhibited in Bernard François's contemporary jewellery gallery, Néon (BE). He revelled in the place and its unconventional atmosphere, even if he did not altogether understand the works. The Salvador Dali painting '*The Soft Watches*', which he discovered at the same time, fascinated him. He was captivated by the contrast between the rigidity and the languidness of time that pervades or flies past. This was a light-bulb moment for him: we can express serious issues in a lighthearted manner.

Patrick Marchal was reassured. On the advice of Bernard François, he went to France and studied visual arts and contemporary jewellery for a year at the Ateliers de Fontblanche in Nîmes. In his discipline, he encountered Wilhelm Tasso Mattar (DE), a silversmith from whom he learned the concepts of Direction-Volume / Tension-Elasticity and a functional approach to design. In the work of the sculptor and jewellery creator Gilles Jonemann (FR), he appreciated the organic forms and ethnic style.

During his apprenticeship in Fontblanche, he met several professionals including Jean Pierre Raffaëlli (FR), professor at the school of performing arts in Marseille, Macha Makeïeff (FR) and Jérôme Deschamps (FR), directors and co-founders of the theatre company and style 'Les Deschiens'. Enthralled with the organised delirium, the apprentice produced wild paintings, quite the reverse of his more restrained jewellery creations.

He visited galleries, which enabled him to gain a knowledge of art. This was when he discovered drawing and architecture, spontaneously taking an interest in the work of the architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Glasgow School of Art. With his baggage of knowledge gained in a resolutely multidisciplinary spirit worthy of the Bauhaus, he returned from France and began his own personal artistic production.

At the same time, he worked as a freelance for royal warrant-holder jewellers. [In 1992, he was subcontracted to repair the wedding ring of the Belgian astronaut Dirk Frimout]. Patrick Marchal rose above it all and without altogether realising it, his spirit of derision began to take shape. He nicknamed himself with ironic poshness as the 'fournisseur de l'espaaaaace' (purveyor to space), took part in his first exhibitions in Belgium at the Néon gallery alongside silversmith David Huycke (BE) and established his wild, explosive logo.

At such great heights, there is no condescendance. One simply observes the irresistible surrealism of the universe.

THE 90S – “SHALL WE LAUNCH INTO SOCIETY, DARLING?”

In response to a society which he perceived to be oppressive, the virtuoso artist of assemblage techniques created spatial constructions, his so-called “silverwork sculptures”.

Out there “it’s Beirut!”. As a form of resistance, in order to be constructive, he launched into a technical struggle from which a series of highly aestheticised wearable items emerged – brooches, ring, necklaces and pendants.

His modus operandi is to use the material as a starting point. The physicality and forms are made to serve the aesthetics. The metal is then adjusted, riveted, welded and embellished.

Two planes create volume. By assembling symmetrical elements with the noble colour of the metal, the volume is physically intensified. An open structure is composed of a robust body with adjacent forms extending from it, rods and more ethereal, fine cables. It is reminiscent of high-tech architecture, with its metal girders and lightweight structures stretching over a support inspired by brutalism. Pride of place is given here to urban concrete, with a nod to skyward-pointing inca temples. The creative process, with a firm grasp of the various materials – silver, gold, stainless steel and iron – is meticulously orchestrated on the model of architectural plans by Norman Foster or Tadao Ando.

In his first creations, he explored the limits imposed by the material; matter has its own laws. His experience with the copper and aluminium *Inca* brooch was highly instructive. The surface treatment enabled him to achieve variation at the same time as permitting a timid reflection to emerge. Its undulations espouse the body’s curves. The tension can be seen above all in the assemblage of materials around the carefully considered concept of Tension-Elasticity, with an added touch of irony. His *Guillotín premier* necklace, also emblematic in terms of the object’s functionality, is unequivocal.

As a prelude to parody, *La belle prétentieuse*, a serious, eccentric and elegant fantasy, features in this series like a herald. The crescendo is achieved with *The Golden boy’s King*, the ode to often very hard noble metals – gold and titanium – associated with iron and stainless steel. The curves here reign supreme.

The *Ave Maria* bracelet, a homage to colour and to Josep Maria Jujol, the disciple and mainstay of Antoni Gaudí, signals the end of unbridled aestheticism. Video clip images from television serials nurtured his imagination and his thinking became increasingly critical.

Patrick Marchal is not a number, he is a free man! The tone is reactive, incisive and distinctive.

From this watershed period, the *The Golden boy'\$ King* crown appears to be visionary. The composition is a satire on speculation and the wealthy, dominant social class. The gold ingots are at the top of the social ladder, the black steel base is reminiscent of workers. Everything is mounted on tools.

'The Golden boy'\$ King crown combines gold, steel and iron. At the top of their social ladder, the dominant gold ingots indecently display their weath without impunity, having been acquired discretely through the world and misery of others.

Rest assured, thanks to the steel guardrails, they are sealed off and well protected from the black steel, which is also reminiscent of coal or the stale bread paid so dearly by workers. Fortunately there is a lesson: since money can't buy happiness for the poor, leave the gold to some and let others make it.'

SINCE 2000 – “BETWEEN DERISION AND RESYMBOLISATION OF THE WORLD”

Hail Mary, but I'm no angel. Patrick Marchal likes to play on contrasts and the absurd to reveal what is essential.

The first stage is reflection, the materials are then chosen according to the idea that has been developed. The effects of form and material serve the intention. Each piece is the result of research and subtle connections. With the help of symbols from our modern civilisation, the artist then examines our incongruities and has some fun. His jewellery, with its evocative names, filled with visual messages and sometimes accompanied by texts, aims to be lucid. The different types of jewellery, be it a medallion, bracelet, cross, crown or protective mask, pose questions. The artist pushes the boundaries of provocation without falling into vulgarity and offers us a number of clues, notably via his blog.

The compositions are skilful and delicate. By subtly tackling our world, achieving the right balance between delivering a heavy message in a lighthearted tone, will the silversmith allow us to take a less inhibited view? Lightness is the removal of weight. From astonishment to indignation faced with human issues, the artist seeks out the irony behind all of this and leaves us the choice between comedy and drama.

The artist himself situates his work between derision and resymbolisation. A silversmith at heart, at the peak of his craft, he reinterprets a not altogether shiny reality.

The *Give me fight* brooch for Give me five. The sheriff's star, incrustated with symbols of the USA - a Coca Cola bottle, a hand grenade, Mickey ears, \$, an oil rig derrick, the Marlboro symbol and the Ku Klux Klan - signed by Marchal@united.com with the transfer of a portrait of G.W. Bush, operates alone as a parody of American society.

Through the condensation of signs, the artist captures the spirit of the times at a critical stage, where even the stainless steel is preserved from damage in adversity.

The *I am your man* bracelets-handcuffs, named after the title of a 1980's Leonard Cohen song, offer an ironic version of love and attachment to one's spouse. *SOLITARITY* is the combination of two antonyms: solidarity and militarism.

“In the opera of the wilderness, panther and bear make love in the cornfield, so-called civilised man strums this song: give me your wheat and you'll be freed, I only want your property and I'll get it. Everyone to the field except the twenty-five, that's the order!”

The tangible tension in the object and the fire plexiglass blend into an allegory. The attention to detail could not be greater. The object and words reinforce each other. The body of the crime, the physical evidence of the offence, is elsewhere. Who is wounded? The body, the focus of all attention in this work, is called into play. Kitsch also enters the scene.

In the *O No* blue helmet's medallion, the peacekeeper is not recompensed like Panurge's sheep charging with its head down, but like a courageous ram charging against weapons.

Silver for honour and a ribbon as a decoration are standard practice. In this well-proportioned whole, the animal is the element of surprise, an absurd response.

The *Fukushima mon amour* mask considers the nuclear issue. A protective mask is placed on the map used by the American crew of the Enola Gay bomber which dropped the first nuclear bomb on the city of Hiroshima in 1945. A map of Japan is drawn on the mask. The radioactive symbol, used here to represent the exhalation valve, lies where Fukushima would be located. The well-aimed, scathing humour hits the nail on the head.

This is a good example of the research process and how accessories are diverted to serve the intention, emphasised by a precise, charcoal pencil drawing.

Chapter upon chapter, the artist's blog describes his world. Patrick Marchal regards it as another construction game, but this time in two dimensions and without material. His moods are laid out here quite plainly: "*I hope, for the safety of my heirs and the future of the sweet potato, that you will not follow my displeasure. I'm counting on you!*" This blog is also a place where, out of a didactic concern, the artist can further describe the ideas behind his pieces.

An incomparable artist, his atypical work enchants connoisseurs and the general public in Belgium and abroad. Patrick Marchal takes part in numerous exhibitions and received a medal in Finland for his *Guillotin premier* necklace.

DO YOU SEE THE KING? – EXHIBITION AT THE CID

In Patrick Marchal's work, knowhow and the spirit of derision combine in a frightening truth. His capacity to deal with serious topics lightheartedly invites us to think again about the issues facing our contemporary world.

For this monographic exhibition, the curator Françoise Vanderauwera confronts imaginative forms and remarkable jewellery, offering an insight into how the intention surpasses the aestheticised practice. She highlights the artist's sense of being weighed down as the driving force for creative exultations, which concludes in a fascinating approach to life, consisting of incredulity and a propensity to laugh, expressed in jewellery, images and words.

By appropriating and playing with our references, the artist offers us a renewed perception of how they came about and above all calls on us not to take anything at face value.

The first pieces, in which the tensions are contained and the traditional precepts are combined with the highly valued material, gave way to a production that is equally flawless in its manufacture but was more unbridled, illuminating and jubilant. Before reaching this stage, the artist experienced moments of inspiration, like interesting reflexes to consider contemporary jewellery. Three crucially significant phases together shaped his approach to the emotional, social and cultural relevance of jewellery.

The material has its own laws, like everything that remains untamed. In order to deal with the vagaries of the profession connected with the material, the visual aspect has to be harnessed. Patrick Marchal aims to limit surprises by following a methodical, highly structured creative process. In addition, the context in which he creates is chaotic, which results in him putting a lot of thought into what he does. In this controlled process, the artist ascribes the greatest importance to knowhow and presentation.

The emotional content and symbolic value that a piece of jewellery can have is broadened. Here the object is essentially palliative, a means to an end. It is the expression of a need to create, to place oneself in a free zone. The result is an item of designer jewellery based on a creative process in which the artist is personally involved and which has a unique signature.

The object's functionality is not created by the object but by the use one makes of it

The King is not who we think it is. It is wearer who makes the jewellery. For Patrick Marchal, the difficulty with contemporary jewellery is not so much ergonomic but social. The issue of wearability is summarised in the social act, the commitment of whoever wears the jewellery. This is the gesture which gives it all its meaning and value.

The artist is playing on the impact that the jewellery has in society and the fact of accepting or rejecting it.

We can consider serious issues lightheartedly

Like a satirical magazine that comically denounces the failings and moral shortcomings observed in society, his work deals with several themes, condemning certain topical events (socio-political, religious, military, ultra-consumerist and ethical etc. issues), but without ever lapsing into vulgarity. He wants them to be identified joyfully. He sometimes offers both sides of an issue in a single piece of work.

For the creator, what matters is conveying the message. His statements are skilfully presented by protocolary items of jewellery connected with our customary practices or by the use of strong symbols or icons borrowed from our visual culture. By combining several signs with humour and derision, the artist effectively catches us unawares and snaps us out of our absent-mindedness.

By drawing from our shared source of references, questioning our cultural practices and humorously assembling what binds us together, the artist's sociological approach takes on its full force.

SCENOGRAPHY – “PANEM ET CIRCENSES”

In a constructed, theatrical, refined presentation, aligned as closely as possible to fine silverwork, the scenographer Marion Beernaerts astonishes us by capturing these moments where the designer, touched by the grace of lucidity, offers us the best of himself: his cheerful humour.

The meticulous, illuminating and joyful scenography showcases some thirty contemporary pieces created by the artist since the 1990s in a space that is treated like an arena.

The arena symbolises the theatre of life, an arrangement of society, a relatively free, enclosed space. It is a place where actor and spectator overlap and the jewellery provides the entertainment. Through the jewellery, our ceremonies, beliefs, politics and values are also put to the test in this arena.

As an introduction to the subject and a prelude to the surprise effect required for humour, a video made by the artist presents the creator and the images that have inspired him, whilst also informing us about his artistic profession.

With its choice of controversial items for this monographic exhibition, the CID has set out to discover the essentials of contemporary jewellery. It is an artistic practice which upholds the importance of questioning. It draws on our shared emotions, based on a language and a creative process in which the artist is personally implicated and is hallmarked with a unique signature. This is designer jewellery.

With *Do you see the King?*, mastery of the artistic profession and original expression are displayed in all their splendour.

Bésamé mucho macho

Ring, 2003

Silver, titanium, polyester,
stainless steel, 85x60x25 mm

© photo J.P. Pfister



Ave Maria

Bracelet, 2001

Silver, titanium, copper, colors.

Ø int. : 70 mm

Ø ext. : 165 mm

Depth: 55 mm

© photo Patrick Marchal



La belle prétentieuse

Pin, 1996
Gold 750/1000, iron, steel
Stainless, 102x45x21 mm
© photo Patrick Marchal



Give me Fight

Pin, 2002
Stainless steel, silver, lacquer,
90x90x7 mm
© photo Paul Louis



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